

Money's worth: Net+Effects president Selmeier sees the value in high-speed nets.

the Westin Hotel chain.

If there's any doubt that Web publishing is a specialized expertise, take a look at some of the computer industry's most successful players who have opted for outside help with their home pages. WAIS Inc. (Wide Area Information Servers) in Menlo Park, Calif., sports a customer list that includes high-tech giants Novell, Intel, Sun Microsystems, Cisco Systems, Pacific Bell, and Perot Systems. Novell's home page includes product updates and customer references; Cisco's is an automated help desk; Perot Systems' is an internal home page with indexed résumés of its technology specialists.

Like some other Web service providers, WAIS sells its own server software, WAIS-Server 2.0, with modules for user registration, content billing, invoicing, text searching, and other online functions. The company also works with systems integrators such as EDS,

KPMG Peat Marwick, and IBM's Integrated Systems Solutions Corp., the latter on a project to post content from a major metro newspaper.

"We really focus on the Internet as a distribution channel," says WAIS president Brewster Kahle. "Very few companies think through their objective for their Web service, [such as asking] 'What's the business model?'" WAIS tried to help companies make those determinations, Kahle says.

Who are you trying to reach: MTV maniacs, upscale thirtysomething technophiles, corporate software buyers, or structural engineers? They all use the Web, but effective methods for organizing online information to each group are as diverse as the

groups themselves. Even if you have the technical skills in-house to create Web content, outside expertise on what works can help.

"It would be very easy for us to create incredibly dull stuff," says GE's Pocock, whose home page contains extensive technical information about the company's polymers and resins for customers in the auto parts finishing industry. One World Interactive is currently helping GE design an onscreen automobile where users can click on the bumper, for example, to learn how GE's Xenoy resin can strengthen and protect it.

Because his staff members have been working with One World since August, Pocock admits they now know enough about HTML and hypertext links to do it themselves. But One World's expertise with the nuances of the Net make it worthwhile to maintain the link. "If we

looked at this very narrowly, we could do it ourselves without paying the consultant's profit margin," Pocock says. But he recognizes the value of the consultative role and the brainstorming that results from working with people who bring a different perspective.

Another View

Other companies, however, will be more willing to bring their Web efforts back in house as more reliable products for the do-it-yourselfer come on the market. Such products include HTML converters such as Interleaf Inc.'s Cyberleaf and Microsoft's Internet Assistant for Word, and Web server software from vendors including Netscape Communications, Open Market, Spry, and Process Software. "The dynamics of build versus buy will probably change as more commercial tools become available," says Cathy Medich, executive director of Com-

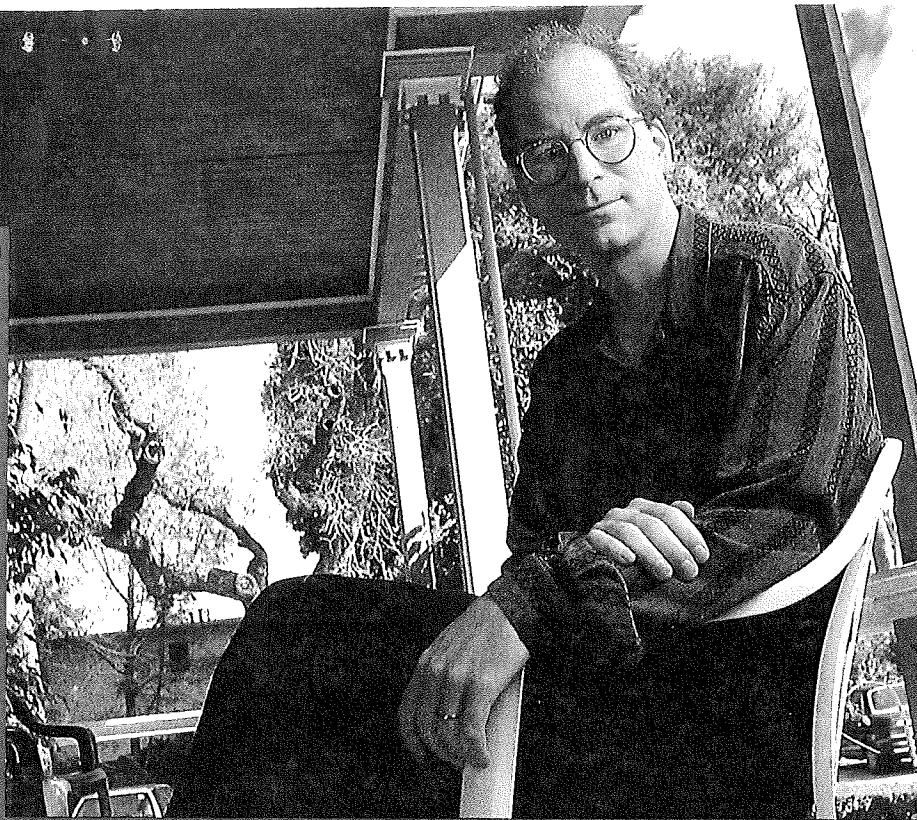
A Little Company That Could

Phoenix rises to the challenge of the Web

When \$6 billion General Electric Plastics division mulled a World Wide Web home page, it decided to seek outside help. But when tiny competitor Phoenix Polymers Inc. saw what GE had done, it said, "We can do that ourselves."

Phoenix, in fact, took its Web activities a step further by spinning off a new consulting business designing Web sites for others. "For us to be able to do something on a par with GE is tremendous," says Greg Koski, president of the 12-employee plastics manufacturer in Fitchburg, Mass. "I can't even begin to think what we'd have to spend on a [traditional] mar-

keting program." Dave King, technical services manager at Phoenix, says the company had plenty of Internet expertise from using the Net as an information source. "We've tended to hire computer-aware people," he says. When Phoenix decided to post their own home page, it never thought to seek outside help, says King. Phoenix already has two customers for its fledgling Web service business, but doesn't foresee joining the ranks of the hard-charging Web service providers. "We're not approaching it as a business opportunity," says King. "It's more to keep our own expertise current." —C.W.



Thoughtful: 'Companies should think through their objectives,' says WAIS's Kahle.

merceNet, a Menlo Park, Calif.-based consortium of 80 companies with Web presences.

The dynamics already are changing at Macmillan Publishing, where Gold makes it clear that one of Free Range Media's duties is to train his staff in Web page expertise. "You don't want to be forever indebted to the company that built it," he says. "I want my staff to maintain it themselves once all the initial content is complete."

Addressing Concerns

Web service companies can also help corporations deal with the No. 1 Internet phobia: security. Most service providers will post customer home pages on their servers if the customer wants, reducing the customer's network exposure to hackers. And many offer the ability to use a direct Web address, such as <http://www.visa.com>.

continue to provide the expertise that helps large companies bring their information, marketing message, and products into the new world of the Web—a world where even Ragu spaghetti sauce has a home page at <http://www.eat.com>

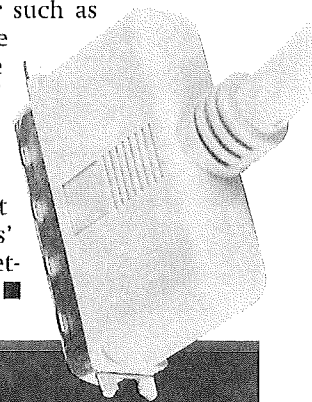
"If you're a staid old marketer such as Ragu, and you want to reach the young Net audience, a lot of these Web service companies are of that ilk," says Williamson of Advertising Age. "I don't think you'll see too many traditional marketers doing it themselves." At least not until those marketers' executive ranks are filled with veteran Net surfers.

Some smaller service providers even subcontract the actual running of Web servers. Net+Effects, for example, runs the Web pages it creates on servers at InterNex Information Services Inc. in Menlo Park, Calif.

So how do you find the Web service provider that's right for your company? One of the best ways is "word of mouse"—cruising around on the Web, finding home pages you find compelling, and contacting the companies to see which vendor they used, if any. Finesse Liveware maintains a list on the Internet of some 60 Web service companies, but it's by no means complete; it's available at <ftp://ftp.einet.net/pub/INET-MARKETING/wwwsvc-providers> or via electronic mail at wwwproviders@finesse.com.

Growth Forecast

As Web service providers grow, some will merge and consolidate, some may become household names, and some may be bought by familiar industry powers. But even as the industry grows and matures, it will



Home Page Do's And Don'ts

DO

- ◆ Plan ahead. Consider where the Web fits into your sales and marketing strategy.
- ◆ Make it interactive. Consider online promotions, coupons, E-mail opportunities, and hypertext links.
- ◆ Create an online community. Make your Web site a place where customers and partners can go for information about your company.
- ◆ Be creative. Even arcane information can make a home page interesting.
- ◆ Update often. The Web allows for a lot of flexibility, so if it ain't broke, fix it anyway so it doesn't go stale.

DON'T

- ◆ Announce a Web site before it's ready. Instead, offer an E-mail link that will send a message when it's ready.
- ◆ Assume everyone has a T1 line and a first-rate Web browser. Fancy graphics can be slow to download via modem. Instead, offer text-only alternatives.
- ◆ Be obsessed with what's 'cool.' It's better to keep content consistent with your corporate image.
- ◆ Rush onto the Web. Instead, consider your corporate goals in cyberspace and what it will take to achieve them. Doing it wrong is worse than not doing it at all.

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